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ABSTRACT

This discussion on the merits of requiring four years of general education studies for prospective teachers focuses on the philosophical ingredients of liberal arts courses. One, perennialism, advocates students learning content from great minds of the past. The other, essentialism, emphasizes that basic subject matter can be identified and taught to all students. The values inherent in these two philosophies are discussed in the light of their relevance to teaching and the general literacy of teachers. Some recommendations are made for incorporating liberal arts education into the preservice preparation of teachers. (JD)

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EDUCATION AND THE LIBERAL ARTS

Numerous professional journals of education contain manuscripts on the need for preservice teachers to experience a four year undergraduate program of the liberal arts. The Holmes Group, a consortium of leading universities, advocates a four year baccalaureate degree in the liberal arts followed by a fifth year of professional education course work and internship experiences.

Teacher education four year degrees seemingly have always emphasized approximately two years of general education. General education classes here are equal to the liberal arts. Whether the concept general education or the liberal arts is utilized appears to be mundane and not worthy of differentiation.

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The Liberal Arts Defined

A major problem persists pertaining to defining the liberal arts. Liberal arts courses are generally taken by all students pursuing a specific major be it mathematics, science, social sciences, or English. Thus, a core of courses, the same for all, are taken by these students. There may be a few choices such as electing plan one or plan two of classes with a given academic discipline such as mathematics. Beyond the core of classes, a student's major would determine the balance of coursework which needs to be completed to receive the baccalaureate degree. A prospective secondary teacher of mathematics would then take classes in this academic discipline beyond the liberal arts require

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-ments.

A preservice elementary school teacher must select an academic major, as is true of prospective secondary teachers. However, most elementary education majors will be teaching in a self-contained room, especially on the primary grade levels. The intermediate grade teacher may teach in a departmentalized school or experience partial departmentalization. However, intermediate grade teachers generally teach in self-contained classrooms. For most intermediate grade teachers, subject matter acquired from liberal arts classes may not be as relevant as are methods and procedures utilized to encourage, stimulate, and motivate students to learn and achieve. For primary grade teachers, complex subject matter knowledge is generally not needed in teaching pupils. There may be an exception here if a gifted or talented primary grade pupil is in the teacher's classroom.

If a core or body of subject matter knowledge is needed by all prospective teachers, which facts, concepts, and generalizations should then be attained by undergraduate students? Perennialism, as a philosophy of education, advocates the Great Books of the western world as possessing salient content for liberal arts majors. The late Robert Maynard Hutchens (1899-1977), former Chancellor of the University of Chicago, and Mortimer Adler (1902-) were/are leading exponents of the Great Books. Perennialism advocates students learning content from great minds of the past whose ideas have endured in space and time. Recent literature for students then is not recommended. Rather, enduring ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, St. Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, among others, become important for under-

graduate students in ongoing courses of study.

Perennialism has certainly made its recommendations in terms of a liberal arts curriculum for students. The Great Books would then provide common learnings for all students, regardless of the major being pursued for the baccalaureate degree.

The Great Books in their entirety would be difficult to justify in a liberal arts curriculum for classroom teachers, especially on the primary and intermediate grade levels. Selected courses pertaining to the Great Books could be required for students to take on the undergraduate level. Additional classes may be taken as electives.

Essentialism, as a philosophy, emphasizes that basic subject matter needs identification which all students should master. A nonvocational undergraduate liberal arts curriculum would then be in evidence. Specialization of courses leading to careers, professions, and vocations may well follow the undergraduate liberal arts program. As is true of essentialism, perennialists also advocate a nonvocational undergraduate degree. Essentialism differs from perennialism in that the former does not look to the past for objectives of instruction in the Liberal arts, Rather, essentialists emphasize students take course work in depth and breadth pertaining to the social sciences, mathematics, the humanities, science, and the fine arts. Intellectual development for learners represents the major goal and objective of instruction. Essentialists believe that basic content for all students to attain can be identified and taught to students. A demanding set of courses based on the essentials emphasizes a strong academic curriculum.

Measurement and testing movements stress a philosophy of students

achieving predetermined objectives. Each objective is stated in measurable terms. Subject matter in the liberal arts has been carefully selected by instructors and written as objectives in measurable terms. The instructor teaches content so that learners may attain the chosen ends. After instruction, the instructor measures if students have/have not attained the objectives. The test may be given on a daily, weekly, midterm, or final evaluation basis. Higher test results become salient to instructors. Criterion-referenced as well as norm-referenced tests are utilized to measure student progress. Quality teaching is reflected within higher test scores for students. Thus the proof of better liberal arts instruction is high tests scores from learners in the class setting.

Student decision-making, as a philosophy of instruction, may also be emphasized in the liberal arts. Thus, an adequate number of elective courses need to be available in the liberal arts. Within each liberal arts course, ample choices need to be available for students to select topics for discussion. For term projects, each student may choose what to complete, within a flexible, open-ended framework.

With student decision-making involved in scope and sequence of the liberal arts curriculum, interest in learning might be optimal. Purpose or reasons for learning may also be inherent. Individual differences might well receive major emphasis.

What is relevant and vital to learn in an open-ended liberal arts curriculum depends upon the chooser. The individual selects and sequences objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures. Relevancy and significance are in the eyes of the beholder, not in

instructor assignments nor in textbook content. Flexibility is a key concept here with elective classes; learner involvement in selecting of goals, activities, and appraisal procedures; and student choice of term projects to be completed such as topics for term papers.

A fifth philosophy in teaching the liberal arts emphasizes utilitarian concepts. Thus, when lesson unit plans are developed for teaching, needed subject matter is sought at that specific time. When pupils are taught in student teaching, the intern invites the former to identify questions and problems in ongoing lessons and units. In sequence, reference materials are located by pupils with intern assistance. A hypothesis or answer to the question/problem follows. The hypothesis/answer is tested by utilizing additional sources of data. The results would indicate that the hypothesis/answer is accepted or refuted.

A problem solving philosophy is highly salient in a utilitarian philosophy of teaching and learning. Knowledge here is not an end in and of itself, but rather it is a means to an end. Liberal arts content then is not acquired for its own sake, but for use to develop lessons and units, as well as to assists pupils to identify and solve problems.

In Closing

Diverse philosophies may well be emphasized in the liberal arts. Perennialism tends to separate content from the liberal arts and its use in the preservice internship. Knowledge from the liberal arts is acquired for its own sake. Hopefully, at a later time the student will

be able to recall liberal arts content needed in actual teaching-learning situations for pupils.

Essentialism advocates core courses that all students need to take in the liberal arts. Core courses without electives might fail to meet individual needs and differences among students. Core content acquired needs to be utilized by the intern at a later time for lesson/unit development and the internship in teaching.

Measurement and evaluation procedures might stress isolated content that individual student acquire. Ideas need to be related, rather than taught in isolation. Content achieved here also needs to be utilized at a later time for actual teaching-learning situations during the internship.

Decision making philosophies involve choices made by students in the liberal arts curriculum. Input is prized here as being important.

Problem solving philosophies of teaching have much to offer. Liberal arts content is acquired as needed in lesson/unit development during the internship.

The writer recommends:

1. less separation of the liberal arts from actual teaching experiences during the internship. Too frequently, undergraduate students forget liberal arts content if learned for its own sake, rather than for use and application.
2. evaluation of liberal arts content needed for elementary teachers. How much content in English and American literature, calculus, physics, chemistry, and grammar does a prospective elementary need to become a true professional in assisting pupils to achieve optimally? This is

truly an issue.

3. minimal utilization of predetermined measurably stated objectives in teaching. These kinds of objectives tend to fragment the liberal arts in terms of isolated content.

4. more emphasis placed upon problem solving procedures whereby students utilize liberal arts content to develop lesson plans and units for actual teaching in the internship. Within liberal arts courses, adequate emphasis needs to placed upon students identifying and securing content to solve problems.

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